

# ***Jenny, the Flying Ford***

**by Elroy Arno, 1915-1946**

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*Jenny was a rare car indeed: number 1,000,000 off the production line.  
You'd expect her to have unusual qualities...*

Illustration:

Jenny rose into the air, fenders flapping

IT was pitch dark behind Lew Jenken's barn. The moon had long since hidden behind a bank of clouds. And for a good reason. This was Halloween, and the moon couldn't continue watching what took place below.

The Elks were busy. That is, the Elks Club of Fountain Falls, not the toothy variety of north-woods animal. The Elks had a surprise on tap for Lew Jenken.

Namely, Lew would awaken in the morning to find Jenny, his Model T Ford, astraddle the roof-beam of the barn.

The job of getting bulky old Jenny to her weather-vane post wasn't a simple one. Several members had already fallen the length of the shingled roof and landed in the haystack below. However, piece by piece, Jenny's metal anatomy was going up the ladder.

Jenny, be it understood, was not the common variety of Ford. She had been number 1,000,000 off the assembly line and Henry had felt like breaking a bottle of champagne over her bow. Mr. Ford had made this remark at Jenny's launching:

"She's smooth, all right. Looks as though she might take off and fly."

So proud was Jenny at that moment, she almost tried to fly. However, her fenders were on tightly and she was unable to flap them. The moment was long since forgotten.

Twenty years had passed. Jenny (short for Jennifer) was now held firmly together by baling wire. She managed to stay on the road, delivering Lew Jenken and his eggs to Fountain Falls every week-end. She quenched her modest thirst with distillate and carried on.

But because Jenny *did* have a personality of her own, she resented the treatment she was now getting. Not that she hadn't been taken apart before. Her entire physical apparatus had been strewed about the lawn so many times that she wondered how she managed to go on.

It was now past midnight. Lew Jenken was fast asleep, sawing on a favorite log. He dreamed that one of his flock of hens had just produced a golden egg and he was signing a contract for the wonderful fowl with Walt Disney.

The Elks were sweating their way up and down the ladder with Jenny, or parts thereof. Jenny had but one consolation. What she lost on the ground, she gained on top of the barn. As she came apart, so did she go together again, but with minor variations.

Walter Frish, High Master or something, of the visiting Elks, toddled down the ladder after the fifteenth trip and accosted his-nearest brother.

"And me with a bad heart," he managed to puff. "This would kill me if I had to work this hard."

Curt Rand, expansive, very red and also built for lighter labor, managed a retort.

"Wish I could fly up there," he groaned. "I've counted the steps on that ladder until I know just how high I am by the feel of the wood through my shoe bottom."

Frish started to chuckle.

"I'm thinking of Lew Jenken's face when he comes out here in the morning. It's the only thing that keeps me alive."

The Elks toiled on.

AND so it was that at two o'clock on that crisp October night, Jennifer the Model T found herself complete once more, worn tires straddling the top of Lew Jenken's barn.

Her headlights, engine and seat cushions were in approximately the correct places. Beyond that, Jenny didn't dare to guess. Not that she was frightened. For a car, she was experiencing an entirely new set of emotions.

The Elks were gone.

Jenny took an experimental lunge forward, her left tires slipped and she started to slide toward destruction. Jenny balanced herself again but for an instant her piston-rings slapped terribly. Then the wheels stopped slipping and Jenny remained tense, afraid to move again.

The moon was still hidden. Jenny blinked one headlight, then the other and her faint, yellow eyes cast a glow across the farm-yard. With her lights on she felt safer. However, the height gave her a start. How on earth would she ever get down?

Jenny sat there a long time, crouching forward on her springs, engine pumping wildly, wondering what to do next. Then into her mind came the old yearning.

Jenny had always wanted to fly.

Henry Ford had said she looked almost smooth enough to do so. In fact Jenny had secretly tried to fly several times during her colorful career. Always she failed, but with the feeling that perhaps it might be that her fenders were too tight. She had never been able to flap them.

Now they were looser than they had ever been before.

The Elks had been careless with their wrenches and screwdrivers. Jenny felt all wobbly and relaxed. If she could flap her fenders fast enough, could she stay in the air?

Jenny moved forward cautiously to the front end of the barn. The yard was a long way below her. It was muddy, but still not a soft place to land. She knew she was taking the chance of wrecking her rear end again, and that wasn't a pleasant thought.

What of it? A girl of her age had seen life. Why not take a chance?

Jenny crouched forward, her springs flexing under her, and cold sweat broke out on her radiator. She leaned back again, straining away from the big open space before her.

It was no use. How could a Ford fly?

But, unless she tried, how would she ever know? There was a lot of woman in Jenny. A lot of that stuff that says "you've got to try everything once." Jenny flapped one fender. It was very wobbly. It moved up and down lazily, almost a foot. She tried the others. They all wiggled up and down and she felt very light in the dash-board. It was a queer heady feeling.

Jenny took a long chance.

She backed up about five feet, gathered her wheels under her and leaped forward with all the power she could manage. The edge of the barn was gone and she hung in space over the barn-yard. She was so frightened that she almost forgot to fly. Then, with a great clatter, she started to pump her fenders up and down with all her strength.

Jenny didn't fall. She hung in space, then slowly, very slowly, moved in a gentle arc up over the house. It was wonderful, feeling her strength like this. Jenny reached the road, flew over it, then tried a few slow glides and swoops. They worked without a hitch. She dropped gently to the drive beside the house, settled into the dust and let her fenders flap.

The moon was bright now and she was afraid someone would see her.

Triumphantly, Jenny rolled up the drive, and through the open barn door. Contented and at peace with herself at last, she dropped into a long, peaceful sleep. Something feminine and subtle within Jenny had been satisfied. At last her full power was realized. No Cadillac or Auburn would push her from the highway again. The world held endless experiences now that she had longed for all these years.

LEW JENKEN was a mild man. He had a couple of hundred chickens and they provided a small income by supplying eggs and fryers for the market at Fountain Falls. This morning he was angry. The neighbors had borrowed Jenny the Model T, yesterday.

He hadn't driven her since then, but what had happened to Jenny was a shame. He backed Jenny out of the garage this morning, realizing that her fenders were about ready to fall off. There wasn't a tight bolt on her old body and he wondered if she'd make the trip to town without falling apart.

Lew backed the T up to the door of the hen house. He collected the last of the eggs, put them in a partly filled egg-crate and placed it on the rear seat. Then he went back into the coop and brought out three full crates, the accumulated work of a week for himself and fifty layers.

"Eggs," he mumbled to himself. He spat tobacco juice half way across the yard and climbed behind Jenny's wheel. "Fifteen cents a dozen, and with butter at fifty-six. Can't sell enough to buy a living. Oughta do something..."

Lew had been going to do something about living conditions for twenty years. He never quite got to it.

Jenny felt grand this morning. Under Lew's guiding hand, she entered the county road and started sputtering toward Fountain Falls. Twice she hopped a few feet off the road, trying out her new power. Lew swore, blaming the jumps on the bad road.

"I swear they oughta scrape these roads a couple times a year."

Jenny listened to Lew's complaints, and moved ahead with a certain degree of speed. As she moved, a strange new emotion took hold of her. So many times she had come this way. Always she had carried Lew and his crates of eggs. This morning something new had been added. Jenny was feeling her oats.

"I ain't so old," she whispered to herself. "Pfui, what's twenty years? Got a few more years in me. I can fly like a kite."

Then she lapsed into thought, wondering if her plan wasn't a little risqué for an old girl with her mileage.

"But why?" she asked herself. "So I can fly like a bird? Birds manage, don't they? I could try!"

Naturally what Jenny was pondering could hardly be known. Her words, and her thought were not audible.

At last she made up her mind. She snorted, overheated a little with excitement, and her radiator started to puff and blow off steam.

"So I ain't got feathers, and I ain't got the ability to get started," she muttered darkly. "But I can do the rest of the job as well as anyone."

Her last words were pronounced just as Lew got out to pour fresh water into the boiling radiator. It all happened so fast that to this day Lew isn't sure if Jenny actually moved, or if he was clipped by a Flying Fortress.

Jenny gathered her springs under her and bounced into the air. Her radiator cap caught Lew under the chin and sent him spinning into the dust. Lew tried to roll over, gave up and passed out cold. Not so Jenny. She felt the smooth power of her fenders as she sprang into the air. She gained altitude fast, pumping with all the strength in her tank. She was above the road and leveling out for swift flight. She knew exactly where she was going. A few miles behind Lew's farm was a dense wood-lot. In it, several huge elm trees reached high into the air, with huge spreading branches. Jenny swooped around, caught the beam and went winging away across sunny farm land. A few crows, startled by the sight of a flying Ford, followed at a safe distance. Jenny flew carefully and the eggs on the rear seat rocked with the vibration of her body.

THE remainder of Jenny's story is legend in Fountain Falls. Lew Jenken wandered into town during the afternoon, his jaw swollen and his temper matching it. He met Walter Frish in front of the grocery store.

"And by golly, someone jumped in her and knocked me down. They stole the buggy and the eggs too."

Frish wanted to ask Leo how he managed to get Jenny off the barn so fast, but Frish was also Sheriff; and if Lew's car was stolen, his duty was clear.

"I'll phone the state police right away," he said. "They won't get out of the county with it."

"Wouldn't go far, anyhow," he added under his breath.

BUT the police didn't find Jenny. Lew didn't find her. In fact Jenny was lost for the better part of two weeks.

When at last she was reported, the call came from the county airport.

"Lew Jenken?" the voice on the phone asked.

Lew grunted.

"Mr. Jenken, you reported a Ford missing a coupla week ago?" Lew's interest grew. "Yes!"

A chuckle on the wire. "We spotted your car in a tree, Mr. Jenken."

"In a...?" Lew clutched the table for support. "But—but..."

The chuckle came again.

"Well, it sounds funny, but you said it was a model T. One of our boys was flying over Breeze's wood-lot this morning. He said he saw something in the top of a big elm. He flew low to get a better look, and reports it was a car, probably an old Ford. Don't ask *me* how it got there!"

Lew hung up. He scratched his head, then he scratched his chin. After a long time he scratched his chin again, swore a loud oath and started out on foot across the back-eighty.

So that's where they found Jenny, the flying Ford. She was perched in the highest branches of a big elm. Lew climbed the tree while Walter Frish and Curt Rand waited for him below.

Rand grinned, then sobered quickly.

"No, Walter, it would be impossible."

"That's what I think," Frish agreed.

"The barn was hard enough. How in hell anyone could ever get that Ford way up there...?"

Lew Jenken got the greatest shock, however. It might have been his imagination, but as he edged carefully out toward the limbs that Jenny occupied, he fancied that Jenny moved suddenly, as though about to fall. Lew hesitated, shook his head and moved forward. The limbs were thick and Jenny was across several of them. He reached the car and climbed carefully into the rear seat.

*The egg crates were empty.*

"Stole'm, the...!" he murmured, then his eyes opened wide.

The eggs were gone. In their place, fluttering or cuddling close to Jenny's motor, were dozens of tiny fluffy chicks. Jenny's hood was lifted high. Under it, the chicks struggled over and under her engine. Lew moved out farther, not able to believe what he saw.

His hand moved out carefully and he managed to grab a chick. Jenny's motor started with a bang, roared loudly and the tree started to vibrate. Lew dropped the chick and scurried back toward the trunk of the elm. Jenny's motor idled gently and the chicks flocked closer to the warm engine.

Jenken didn't stop until he reached the ground.

"I see she still works," Frish said. "Heard you start the motor."

"What bothers me," Rand said, "is how do we get her down?"

Lew Jenken was shaking from head to foot.

"We don't," he stuttered. "By the gods, we leave the motherly old settin' hen up there where we found her."

Head down, he started toward home.

IT has never been recorded how or when Jenny left the elm tree in Breeze's wood-lot. Lew Jenken knew, because right after that he bought a second-hand pickup. He returned to the wood-lot once and found a couple of hundred well-started chicks under the elm tree where Jenny had perched. He sold them at a very nice price, and used the cash for a down payment on the pickup.

As for Jenny? That one attempt to become a mother had brought her a surging wish to live. A long-felt need to visit new and exciting places. She tired of her flock soon after it hatched, and set out on wing to see the world.

Thus, dear reader, if you awaken some spring morning to find a decrepit model T Ford staring in your bedroom window from a nearby tree, you will probably be dead sober. It will be Jenny the flying Ford, seeking excitement in far fields.

